

Inside Olivia Pope's Closet

We visited the *Scandal* wardrobe closet and spoke with costume designer Lyn Paolo. And you won't believe which coat Kerry Washington hated.

This is Lyn Paolo, the woman who dresses Olivia Pope on *Scandal*.



If anyone knows an Olivia Pope look, it's Lyn Paolo, who's been the costume designer for *Scandal* since the show's pilot. Now that *Scandal* is in its third season, that distinct Pope palette has become iconic, even though it's changed ever so slightly with each new season.

"I love the idea of having Olivia, this beautiful woman, in a room full of men in dark suits, and she's in that white suit," the British-born Paolo said of dressing Kerry Washington. "She just epitomizes strong femininity. I wanted her to just sort of glow, and ultimately look so feminine, and very Jackie O. She's Kate Hepburn, basically."

Paolo dresses the entire cast of *Scandal* — from Fitz down to David — but Olivia Pope gets her own wardrobe closet, which is large enough to hold two walls of trench coats, white pants, silk pajamas, and all those Prada purses. There's a table lined with scarves, and a full-length mirror complete with pedestal for Washington to stand on during fittings.

The only time Paolo and series star Kerry Washington have ever disagreed on wardrobe was during the pilot, when Paolo thought Pope should be in skirts, and Washington firmly pushed for

pants. “In the end, she was right,” Paolo admitted.

Before *Scandal*, Paolo worked as a costume designer on *ER*, which she credits with her ability to use clothing to further the plot. “I learned really fast how to tell a story through clothes on that show,” she said. Now she currently juggles working on *Scandal* and Showtime’s *Shameless*. But Paolo let BuzzFeed in on her secrets behind what clothes end up on Pope, and how they help to tell the scandalous stories.

1. The jacket Olivia wore when her world went dark.



Episode: Season 3, Episode 6, “Icarus”

Designer: Armani

Why it was chosen: In this episode, Kerry has just been told that Fitz was possibly responsible for her mother’s death. And Paolo chose the gray suit, because of all the layers. “It’s dark and light, and has all these different textures and layers,” she said. “You start on her and you just see the gray, but when she stands up you see that everything is getting darker in her life.”

2. The gown that showed Olivia's strength.



Episode: Season 3, Episode 5, "More Cattle, Less Bull"

Designer: Rubin Singer

Why it was chosen: "She went to this event with Jake, and it needed to be a much stronger gown than before," Paolo explained of the "architectural" dress. "The Rubin Singer was all about [being] strong... she knew she was going to see Fitz."

Fun Fact: The Singer gown almost never happened, but Paolo was walking through a Neiman Marcus store and happened to see it on a mannequin. She snapped it up, and it was the first and only gown Washington tried on out of the 50-plus gowns sent to their wardrobe closet.

3. The first use of Alexander McQueen.



Episode: Season 3, Episode 2, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner”

Designer: Alexander McQueen

Why it was chosen: “She’s closed off emotionally in this episode,” she said. “This was at the beginning of the season, and everything was a mess. She couldn’t figure out who was telling her the truth, and everything that’s happening with Huck. I’m a Brit, so I’m a huge McQueen fan anyway, but I loved the idea of her just being really buttoned up. I wanted them to feel like they were going to battle.”

Fun Fact: It’s the show’s first foray into anything McQueen, and that’s because Paolo needed something a little more “military” for Pope.

4. The coat Kerry Washington hated.



Episode: Season 2, Episode 21, “Any Questions?”

Designer: Ferragamo

Why it was chosen: “It was still a joyful time for Olivia, when she and Fitz were talking on the phone regularly.”

Fun Fact: Washington hated the coat at first, because it’s actually pink, which Washington thought “was too girly.” But — surprise — the coat turned white when the camera lights were shone on the material.

5. The flowing vintage gown that almost didn’t happen.



Episode: Season 2, Episode 8, “Happy Birthday, Mr. President”

Designer: Jean Fares Couture

Why it was chosen: “She was going with her boyfriend to this event,” said Paolo. “She was not thinking about Fitz. She’s actually considering being done with him. It’s kind of a romantic moment, so we wanted the gown not to be just a straight up and down column, we wanted it to be romantic.”

Fun Fact: The dress was vintage, and completely falling apart. “The chiffon on the bottom was completely rotted,” Paolo said. “I spent the whole weekend working on this gown.” They also wanted the dress to float when Washington ran in it, so they rented a few wind machines, but didn’t end up using them because it was a stormy night when they filmed.

6. Olivia’s iconic white trench



Episode: Season 1, Episode 7, “Grant: For the People”

Designer: Tory Burch

Fun Fact: “It’s the only thing we’ve ever done with Tory Burch. It was on the pilot, and we couldn’t find white anywhere. It subsequently fell to pieces because we wore it so much on the first season.”

7. The Ralph Lauren trench



Episode: Season 3, Episode 4, “Say Hello to My Little Friend”

Designer: Ralph Lauren

Why it was chosen: “She’s figuring out that her client isn’t quite who he said he is. This is the first major textural thing we’ve done on her, and again, it’s because she’s figured out that this guy [Olivia’s client] isn’t who he said he is. And she hasn’t quite figured out what’s going on with the wife.”

Fun Fact: “I wanted her in something that was 1940s feeling.”

8. The coat that fans ask about the most.



Episode: Season 2, Episode 9, "Blown Away"

Designer: Gucci coat

Why it was chosen: "It was the most expensive thing we had in her closet. We always say it's a little *Casablanca*, but she's Humphrey Bogart."

Fun Fact: This is the piece of fashion that fans ask about most frequently.

9. The look that brought back gloves.



Episode: Season 2, Episode 14, “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot”

Designer: Max Mara

Why it was chosen: Pope was running around, and she’s a put-together woman. If she’s going out in Washington in the middle of winter wearing a three-quarter sleeve coat, you better believe she’s wearing gloves.

Fun Fact: “That was the only time I almost got into trouble, because Shonda [Rhimes] was like, ‘I don’t know why she’d put on gloves,’ and I said she’d need something to keep her warm. But we brought back gloves; even Vera Wang said, ‘You brought back gloves.’”

10. Olivia's '80s style hat



Episode: Season 2, Episode 22, "White Hat's Back On"

Designer: Louise Green

Why it was chosen: "It's a hat that David [Rosen] bought for her, and we had it custom-made. It was a tricky hat... we made all of these different brim widths for that hat. The first hats I picked — because I'm from England — were very dramatic, and very Kate Middleton. And I had to reel myself back in, because Kerry reminded me nicely that David picked the hat out. There are things about it that still trouble me to this day, but Shonda loved it and Kerry loved it."

11. The origin of the original Prada purse.



Episode: All of them

Designer: Prada (what else?)

Why it was chosen: “I had 20 purses in the room, and Kerry said, ‘What about that one?’” The purse Washington pointed to was Paolo’s, and it ended up being used on the show. “ABC owes me a Prada purse; it’s still there today.”

12. Pope’s very first Prada, was the same style Meryl Streep used in *The Devil Wears Prada*



Episode: Season 3, Episode 2, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner”

Designer: Prada

Why it was chosen: “That was the first Prada purse in Olivia Pope’s life. She changed; they grabbed her purse and she starts the next day with the Prada.”

Fun Fact: “She was carrying a Ralph Lauren purse when she was mugged in the train station,” Paolo says of the episode prior to this one. “So the next time you see her going to see her dad, she’s actually carrying the purse that Meryl Streep used in *The Devil Wears Prada* in that opening sequence. Prada took it out of their archives in Italy and sent it to us, so it was current for seven years ago.”